



ECAC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNOR HOCHUL– October 2025

The New York Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is pleased to submit these recommendations, with corresponding action items, to Governor Hochul for consideration for State Fiscal Year 2026-2027 planning. These recommendations were collectively developed to advance the ECAC’s vision and mission.

Background: The ECAC was established to make recommendations to the Governor to support the development of a comprehensive and high-quality service system for young children and their families. The ECAC is codified under the New York State Council on Children and Families (CCF) (NYS Social Services Law § 483-g). To ensure diversity in expertise, perspectives, and experience, the ECAC members represent state agencies, community-based non-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, higher education, unions, and other critical entities across the state. All members are appointed by the Governor. The ECAC also seeks other perspectives through committee participation and annual community “Town Hall” conversations and listening sessions.

Mission: The ECAC’s mission is to provide strategic direction and advice to the Governor and State of New York on early childhood issues.

Vision: The ECAC’s vision is that every child in New York State will be healthy, learning, and thriving in a family that is supported by a full complement of services and resources essential for successful development.

EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

Develop the infrastructure needed for potential future investments in early care and education (ECE) workforce availability and quality to support the goal of universal child care.

Recommendation 1.1: Adopt a statewide ECE career lattice to inform and support future workforce availability and quality.

Background: The ECE sector is facing a teaching shortage even steeper than the K-12 system – an aging workforce paired with a sharp decline in educators entering the field – while also struggling with remarkably low compensation and benefits.

Under Governor Hochul, the state has made historic investments in the ECE workforce, providing bonuses with Workforce Retention Grants in 2023 and 2024. Yet, additional public investment is needed to support the true cost of providing quality services and recognizing the limited availability of families to pay. To ensure that all New York children have access to quality care, it is strongly recommended that the state work toward investments that incentivize and support workforce quality improvement. Supporting the ECE workforce is vitally important to New York’s ultimate goal of supporting access to universal child care,

universal prekindergarten, Head Start and preschool special education.

The ECAC fully recognizes that the state is facing unprecedented challenges with federal cuts to essential programs such as Medicaid and SNAP. The recommendations below are designed to maximize resources that are currently available and lay a strong foundation for future investment beyond this year.

Each of the recommendations below not only builds on progress that the state has made over the last five years but amplifies Child Care Availability Task Force recommendations and projects supported by the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five initiative led by CCF.

Background: Unlike K-12 education, the ECE field lacks uniform educational requirements for educators who directly serve children in ECE settings, with requirements varying by setting modality and the respective funding and/or oversight agency (licensing, pre-K, Head Start, etc.). This makes it difficult to enter the field and harder still to remain and grow professionally, which is essential for quality and positive child outcomes.

Unlike a career ladder, a career lattice represents the many pathways to enter the ECE field, move across multiple roles, and earn credentials and degrees (versus ascending the rungs of a straight career ladder). A New York State ECE career lattice¹ should consider the [Power to the Profession's Unifying Framework](#), a national collaboration to define the ECE profession. While the lattice should be based on formal education opportunities, it must also recognize years of experience in the field, accessing more advanced levels of professional development, as well as additional responsibilities, such as the supervision provided by center directors and the many roles held by a home-based child care provider.

A career lattice would support workforce availability and quality, helping to support fair compensation, encourage retention, and ensure that high-quality care and education for young children in every setting is supported.

Action Steps:

- 1) Identify a research-informed and stakeholder-reviewed career lattice for ECE professionals to support quality and retention.¹
- 2) Link existing workforce scholarship resources such as the Educational Incentive Program (EIP) to the career lattice and adjust scholarship amounts to incentivize the workforce to advance along the lattice levels, i.e. increase scholarship award amounts as recipients advance in degrees and credentials.

Recommendation 1.2: Support ECE programs to participate in the ECE registered apprenticeship model as employer partners.

Background: Registered apprenticeships are a promising approach to address the ECE workforce shortage, with apprenticeships increasing employee skills, retention, and recruitment.

¹ “A career ladder represents a traditional, linear progression within a single career track, with promotions and advancements occurring vertically. In contrast, a career lattice allows for lateral or diagonal progression and development across multiple roles and functions, offering employees greater flexibility for growth.” <https://www.paylocity.com/resources/glossary/career-lattice/>

A recent brief from the National Early Care and Education Workforce Center highlights the elements required for a successful apprenticeship program, including an employer partner – the ECE program that hosts and employs apprentices. Employer partners provide on-the-job mentorship and professional guidance. This requires more time and resources of the program – additional time from the program director to support a new staff member/apprentice, time from the on-site mentor/master teacher to guide and coach the apprentice, and additional staff time to provide release time to apprentices to attend the instructional courses and other events that are also part of the apprenticeship.

As the ECE sector is already under-resourced and operating on tight financial margins, hosting apprentices, even though badly needed, is simply not financially feasible. Additional resources are needed to enable employer partner apprenticeship host organizations to make apprenticeships a fiscally viable recruitment and retention tool for the ECE field.

Actions steps:

- 1) Support licensed ECE programs to be high-quality registered apprenticeship host sites, through the New York State Department of Labor and other agencies. Funding would augment existing funding for registered apprenticeships to support a minimum of 130 apprentices. (\$200,000)
- 2) Encourage SUNY and CUNY colleges to offer apprenticeship-appropriate educator preparation coursework that is accessible to working professionals/apprentices (online, evenings/weekends), allowing apprentices to learn while they earn, while also offering a pathway to more advanced degrees and credentials.

Recommendation 1.3: Expand and continue scholarship programs that make higher education affordable and accessible.

Background: New York has been a national leader in making public higher education accessible to students, with the Excelsior Scholarship offering free college tuition for income-eligible students. While this remains a great resource for many students across the state, it has not been as successful in supporting the ECE workforce. The Excelsior Scholarship requires student to attend college full-time and many students interested in entering the ECE workforce have work and family obligations that do not allow them to attend college full time.

In the State FY 2025-26 budget, New York State launched the Opportunity Promise (NYSOP) program (also known as SUNY/CUNY Reconnect) to encourage adults ages 25-55 to attend community college and earn no-cost associate degrees in high-need industries, including education (Pathways to Teaching). This initiative is particularly relevant to the ECE field, as Reconnect allows students to attend college part time, allowing them to continue to maintain employment and care for their families while pursuing their education.

Reconnect will offer an incredible opportunity for New York’s ECE workforce, many of whom would welcome the opportunity to pursue a higher education degree. In a previous pilot of a similar program at SUNY and CUNY schools, a majority (72%) of scholarship recipients were over the age of 30 and 91% were female. Scholarship recipients earned a grade of A or B in 96% of the courses taken, all while maintaining employment of at least 20 hours/week. Reconnect will serve this same population, thereby strengthening the workforce and supporting ECE program quality, leading to better outcomes for young children.

Action Steps:

- 1) Continue funding for the Reconnect program to ensure that students have the stability and time needed to complete a degree.
- 2) Consider expanding the Reconnect program to include comprehensive colleges that are located in geographic areas that do not have an accessible community college that offers a degree in early childhood education.

DEVELOPMENTAL HEALTH

Recommendation 2: Expand proven family-centered early childhood developmental screening initiatives that help families identify delays as early as possible and access services to support healthy growth and development.

Background: Parents are the cornerstone of a strong early childhood system. Accordingly, universal strategies that support families understanding child development and equipping them to recognize and celebrate developmental milestones and identify potential developmental delays are one of the best investments we can make as a state.

New York currently ranks last in the country for developmental screening, with less than one-quarter of parents with children ages 9-35 months reporting completing a standardized developmental screening tool in the past 12 months,² and only 17.5% of children receiving formal developmental screenings before school entry at five-years-old.³

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends both developmental monitoring (also called surveillance) and routine standardized developmental screening for all children. There are many free tools that encourage ongoing, parent-engaged, developmental monitoring to help families understand their child's development and connect with appropriate services.

Early identification of developmental delays and disabilities in young children and connection to needed services is crucial for setting the foundation for healthy development.

- 1 in 6 children aged 3–17 years have developmental disabilities (conditions that affect how children play, learn, speak, act, or move).⁴

² America's Health Rankings (Value and rank based on data from 2022-2023). [Explore Developmental Screening - Children in New York | AHR](#)

³ Hirai, A., Kogan, M., Kandasamy, V., et. al. Prevalence and Variation of Developmental Screening and Surveillance in Early Childhood. *JAMA Pediatrics* (September 2018).

⁴ Zablotsky B, Black LI, Maenner MJ, Schieve LA, Danielson ML, Bitsko RH, Blumberg SJ, Kogan MD, Boyle CA. Prevalence and Trends of Developmental Disabilities among Children in the US: 2009–2017. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 144(4):e20190811. As cited in: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, May 22). *Developmental monitoring and screening*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/screening.html#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20about,well%20they%20do%20in%20school.>

- Many children with a developmental disability are not identified until after starting school.
- Early intervention (before school age) can have a significant positive impact on a child’s ability to learn new skills as well as reduce the need for costly interventions over time.

Through multiple state efforts, including the Department of Health’s expansion of Medicaid to explicitly cover developmental screening and CCF’s implementation of the federal PDGB5 and Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grants, New York State agencies are aggressively promoting family-engaged child developmental monitoring in partnership with community organizations. This is a strong start, yet expansion of these efforts is needed to reach more families.

Help Me Grow is another initiative in New York that uses a collective impact model to help families and caregivers track young children’s ongoing progress in building physical, social, behavioral, communications, and thinking skills, and improve the ability of families, caregivers, health and human service providers, and educators to work together. Help Me Grow currently serves 17 counties in New York State through five regional or county-based HMG initiatives, located in the Finger Lakes, Long Island, Onondaga County, Western New York, and Oswego County. Local 211 programs are a key partner for these initiatives, to ensure that families receive accurate information to connect them to available services and resources in their communities.

Action Steps:

Building upon the lessons learned from the state’s successful initiatives described above, the following investments to increase family-engaged child development monitoring and support throughout the state are recommended.

- 1) Actively advance CCF’s developmental milestones outreach to promote awareness of child development, including producing materials in multiple languages to reach more families. (\$500,000)
- 2) Build on the state’s efforts to expand Help Me Grow statewide, either to support three new communities or expand the five existing HMG systems to serve more families. (\$1.5 million)
- 3) Continue funding 2-1-1 New York Inc. statewide at current levels, a key system partner for HMG initiatives. (\$2.8 million)

Recommendation 3: Support New York’s Early Intervention Program for young children ages birth to three.

Background: Early Intervention, for children 0-3, is crucial for children with developmental delays or disabilities, as it maximizes their potential for growth and success by addressing challenges early in life, when the brain is most adaptable. Furthermore, it empowers families through education and resources and helps mitigate the need for costlier interventions to be provided later in life.

The current EI delivery system needs to be updated to meet the needs of 21st century families. As with developmental screening, New York now ranks last in the country in terms of timely delivery of early

Note that the CDC’s definition of a “developmental disability” differs from the definition of developmental disabilities in the NYS Mental Hygiene Law: <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/MHY/1.03>

intervention services. Further, with such uncertainty at the federal level regarding Medicaid, it is more critical than ever to maximize this program's impacts.

The ECAC recognizes and supports the recommendations of the NYS Early Intervention Coordinating Council's Provider Workforce Capacity Task Force, focusing on addressing the disparity between the number of therapists obtaining licensure versus the number entering the EI workforce, and the certification and licensure requirements across the four most-authorized EI disciplines (early childhood special education, speech language pathology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy).

Action Steps:

- 1) Conduct a study that includes a review of models and modalities of EI and preschool special education service delivery to determine if there are alternate, cost-effective service delivery approaches to serve more children, particularly in rural and inner-city communities, as well as a review of workforce preparation regulations and requirements. Such study should be jointly conducted by CCF, DOH, and SED (administrator of preschool special education).
- 2) Draw more professionals to EI and preschool special education by clarifying the current licensure and credentialing requirements to allow for fieldwork hours delivered under the supervision of Early Intervention providers providing facility, group, home, and community services to count towards licensure and credentialing requirements for Early Childhood Special Education, speech language pathology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.
- 3) Explore the integration of EI competency language into continuing education requirements for occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech language pathologists.
- 4) Explore the creation of an Interdisciplinary Extension in Early Intervention and an Annotation for Teaching-Supporting Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities in Early Intervention utilizing existing models for annotations and extension under NYS Education Law.